



# Devils Postpile National Monument Proud Partner Transportation Scholar Program *Final Report*

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## **Included as supplemental material:**

*Reds Meadow – Devils Postpile Shuttle: Background Information and Regional Context*  
December, 2004

*Devils Postpile Transportation Study Scope of Work*  
December 6, 2004

## Introduction:

I was placed at Devils Postpile National Monument as the Proud Partner Transportation Scholar from mid-June 2004 through mid-December 2004. My assignment coincided with a recent change in the Golden Passport and National Parks Pass acceptance policy, which was projected to create a net annual revenue loss for the shuttle operation of \$280,000. To keep the shuttle operational for 2004, the National Park Service and United States Forest Service each agreed to commit 50% of the projected loss on a one-time basis. The Inyo National Forest and Devils Postpile National Monument were expected to find a strategy to operate the shuttle in a financially sustainable way in subsequent years.

I spent the majority of my time facilitating the decision process for the two partner agencies as they worked toward keeping the shuttle operating after 2004. In addition, I recognized that a successful future for the shuttle could involve integration into a regional transit network. The following categories can be used to describe the extent of my efforts and accomplishments as the Devils Postpile Transportation Scholar.

## Documentation and Data Gathering:

The history and data relating to the Reds-Meadow Devils Postpile Shuttle has been documented in various ways and in a number of different places. As I began to facilitate the partnership between Devils Postpile National Monument and the Inyo National Forest, I realized that discrepancies existed and misunderstandings had occurred due to inconsistent data gathering strategies and a lack of documentation. Since the shuttle has been in operation since 1979, there is a great deal that can be learned from looking at the years of success. I decided that a comprehensive document, describing the history of the shuttle, the partnership between the agencies and the regional context would serve Devils Postpile and Inyo National Forest staff as they move toward finding long-term operational solutions. Through collaboration and guidance by NPS and Inyo National Forest staffs, I created a report to be signed by both agencies and stand as a true interagency document. Using an initial background report that I had written in anticipation of the TAG Team visit (see next section for more details), I compiled the report: *Reds Meadow – Devils Postpile Shuttle: Background Information and Regional Context*<sup>1</sup>. It has been reviewed and signed by the Forest Supervisor of the Inyo National Forest, the District Ranger of the Mammoth Ranger District, the Superintendent of Devils Postpile National Monument and the Superintendent of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of this report is included with this document.

## TAG Team Meeting:

In August, 2004 the NPS sent a Transportation Advisory Group (TAG Team) from the Washington Office to Devils Postpile to analyze the shuttle system, and make recommendations for future operations. I played an instrumental role in the planning and facilitation of the three-day meeting. As mentioned above, I authored a report to describe the history of the Reds Meadow-Devils Postpile shuttle, explain the existing partnership and place the transit system within the regional context. This document provided the TAG Team with a solid understanding of the complicated history, current partnership and management of the shuttle system.

I worked closely with Deanna Dulen, Devils Postpile Superintendent, to determine how the three days of the TAG visit would be spent. Together we coordinated an interagency meeting of almost 20 participants, by inviting representatives from the USFS's regional and national office to accompany Inyo National Forest staff. Throughout the three days, the group experienced the shuttle system first hand, hiked throughout the valley, met with drivers and the shuttle operations manager and spoke with stakeholders and local government officials. The TAG meeting allowed the visiting NPS and USFS representatives to gain firsthand knowledge about the complexities and necessity of the shuttle operation. In addition, it allowed the two agencies to collaborate on the national level to deal with the issue of funding the shuttle system.

## Coordination/Facilitation of USFS Partnership:

Throughout my tenure at Devils Postpile, I worked to facilitate and strengthen the partnership between the monument and the Inyo National Forest staffs. After the TAG Team meeting, a "Coordination Team" was formed with members from the Inyo National Forest, Devils Postpile, and Kings Canyon National Parks and the NPS Regional Office. I served as the leader of this group, planning and facilitating conference calls with all members on a bi-weekly basis. As the shuttle season came to an end in mid-October and data from the 2004 operating season was available, this group provided a forum for discussion of the results. The Coordination Team provided comments on the documents that I created (e.g. *Reds Meadow – Devils Postpile Shuttle Report*, *Alternatives Document*, etc.), and were able to work together well to strategize for 2005 operations. Historically, decisions about the upcoming shuttle season have not been made until the last minute. The existence of the Coordination Team, with my leadership as a facilitator and liaison, allowed both agencies to work through the various options for 2005 operations and come to a well-informed, mutually agreed upon action plan with plenty of time for implementation.

## Analysis and Planning:

I utilized the data available and work done previously by the NPS and Inyo NF to analyze seven potential visitor management alternatives. Five of the alternatives include the operation of a shuttle bus; the non-shuttle operations require a vehicle maximum enforcement strategy.<sup>2</sup> The analysis was limited by the fact that data is lacking regarding visitor use patterns throughout the valley, the true vehicle capacity of the area, and how visitors would respond to the alternatives. Capturing this level of data requires significant planning prior to the shuttle operating season. Via the recommendation of the TAG Team, Devils Postpile is likely to be awarded funds to conduct a study to collect and analyze this level of data in 2005. I worked with the TAG Team members to write the PMIS for the funding, and then to develop the scope of work for the transportation study.<sup>3</sup>

Devils Postpile National Monument has never had a General Management Plan (GMP). The superintendent, TAG Team members, and NPS regional staff have all identified the need for a GMP. The GMP will provide the framework for the public process to allow a selection of the preferred visitor access management plan (shuttle or other option). Data gathered in the 2005 transportation study will be used directly in the alternative selection process. Therefore, a large component of the GMP will be the transportation element. I worked closely with Deanna Dulen to craft the transportation-related portions of the PMIS for the proposed GMP.

Devils Postpile National Monument operates with a very small staff (2.5 FTEs). Therefore, there will be limited staff time available during the 2005 operating season to aid in the transportation data collection process and on the ground management of the transportation study. For this reason, it would be very beneficial for Devils Postpile National Monument to be assigned another Proud Partner Transportation Scholar for the period of June 2005 through December 2005. I wrote and submitted the application for another scholar.

## Participation in Regional Transit Planning Efforts:

It is an exciting time for regional transit in the Eastern Sierra. There are currently a number of efforts underway to increase and coordinate the existing transit network. For instance, the towns of Mammoth Lakes and Bishop and Inyo and Mono Counties have hired a consultant to look at the feasibility of creating a Regional Transit Authority. The Inyo National Forest has a proposal for an “Eastern Sierra Expanded Transit System” that they are working to get included in the reauthorization of TEA-21.

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<sup>2</sup> This analysis is included in the *Reds Meadow – Devils Postpile Shuttle: Background Information and Regional Context*.

<sup>3</sup> The scope of work is included with this document.

During my six months at Devils Postpile, I engaged with a number of regional and local transit planning groups and providers and offered my assistance and expertise where appropriate. I have been able to identify a number of benefits to integrating the Reds Meadow – Devils Postpile shuttle into a regional transit system, both from a scheduling and operations perspective. Through my participation in the regional planning conversation, I am confident that as the process moves forward toward expanded transit in the region, the NPS and the USFS will continue to be consulted and included in the conversation. A 2005 Devils Postpile Transportation Scholar will be able to ensure the continuation of this participation.

### Recommendations and Next Steps:

Due to a recent bill passed in the U.S. Congress, the financial future of the shuttle system has changed significantly. H.R. 4818, The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, reclassifies an area with a transit system as an “expanded amenity recreation fee site.” This modification means that the Inyo National Forest will be able to operate the mandatory shuttle in 2005 without honoring Golden Eagle Passports or National Parks Passes. The shuttle operated this way in 2003 and collected revenues in excess of operating costs. Although the change will be unpopular with the public, in the long run it enables financial viability for the shuttle which greatly enhances visitor experience and protects natural resources.

Although H.R. 4818 could provide at least ten years of financial viability for the shuttle as it currently operates, the system has never been fully analyzed. Inconsistent and nonexistent data to describe the numbers of visitors, visitor use patterns, capacity of the valley and safe levels of traffic volumes on the road make it impossible to accurately determine the best visitor access management plan. The proposed 2005 transportation study will collect missing data and provide the information necessary to fully analyze the current system and run models on alternatives. This data will also be utilized in the proposed Devils Postpile National Monument General Management Plan process scheduled to commence in 2006 or 2007. Ideally, a 2005 Proud Partner Transportation Scholar will be assigned to Devils Postpile to assist on the ground efforts needed to efficiently complete that 2005 transportation study.

A number of significant efforts are currently underway in the Eastern Sierra region to improve public transit. Important decisions and even implementation towards this end may occur as early as 2005. Integration of the shuttle system into the regional network in the long term would provide a myriad of benefits for the two federal agencies, visitors to the area and the local communities. It will be critical for the local NPS and USFS staff to continue to participate in regional planning efforts. Participation should include financial support toward capital costs (low-emissions vehicles, transit facility, etc.) if available. The small seasonal staff at Devils Postpile will be challenged to participate fully in such a process. Again, a 2005 Proud Partner Transportation Scholar would

provide the necessary staff time and expertise to ensure adequate participation for optimal collaboration with local and regional entities.